



Billings Association Puts REALTOR® Party Resources to Work in Long-Time “Quality of Life” Program—July 2013

The Billings Association of REALTORS® has a long-held and firm belief that REALTORS® do much more than sell houses – they build communities. And, their actions prove it.

Ten years ago, leaders of the 600-member association decided to coordinate their charitable and community involvement efforts under one umbrella – the Billings Association of REALTORS® Quality of Life Program. It was an idea borrowed from the neighboring Washington REALTORS® Association and seemed like a good way to roll their charitable work and public education efforts into one.

“We’ve always placed a high priority on giving back to the community, and the Quality of Life program, helped to define our work and give it better visibility with both the members and the public,” reflects Amber Sundsted, the association’s government affairs director. “It’s been a grand success ever since.”

“With the Quality of Life program, we established a task force that raises money from our membership and community, and selects how those dollars are disbursed throughout the community. It’s a very focused effort and gets our membership to rally behind the cause,” Sundsted says.

The two main annual events of the program are the Quality of Life Run, begun in 2004, and the Quality of Life Casino Night, launched in 2007. Together the two events raise approximately \$40,000 a year for non-profits in the community.

Since 2004, the association’s Quality of Life programs have raised nearly \$300,000 for local non-profits, including Make a Wish Foundation; Boys & Girls Club; Senior Helping Hands; the YMCA; Big Brothers Big Sisters; and Dress for Success.

One critical key to their success has been the web site they created using the Convio/REALTOR® Party Hub Grassroots Communication System. “The web site allowed us to integrate our events with our fundraising and member engagement,” Sundsted says. “We had a Quality of Life web site before, but it wasn’t as robust as the one we were able to build with Convio in 2007 – and it didn’t cost us a thing to switch over.”

While nearly 270 state and local associations across the country use the Convio/REALTOR® Party system, most use it for advocacy and RPAC fundraising, notes Claire McDonough, NAR’s Director of Online Advocacy.



“The part I love most about the Billings application is that it shows community building instead of straight up advocacy and RPAC.”

In addition to the charity work, another major focus of the Billings Quality of Life program is its public education efforts in the area of growth management. “We are working with elected officials, business leaders, housing advocates and our next-door neighbors for a better community for all of us,” Sundsted says.

The association recently applied for and was granted a \$5,000 Smart Growth Grant from NAR to work with the City of Laurel, 15 miles Southwest of Billings, to update their growth management plan.

All municipalities in Montana are required to have a growth management plan that is updated every five years, Sundsted explains. “The City of Laurel has long been out of compliance. Our grant will help to pay for it, including mapping and printing.

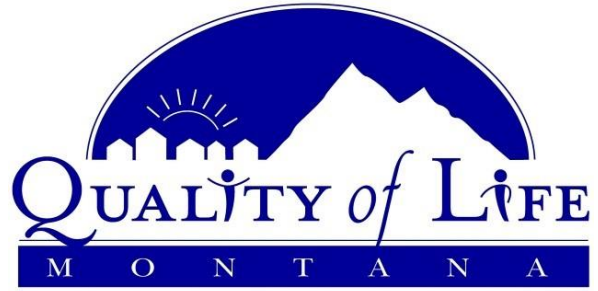
“This is important for us as an organization,” Sundsted explains. “There’s a feel-good element for sure, but more importantly we are actually doing something that makes our community stronger and better. It’s good for business and it’s good for people.”

Sundsted says NAR’s REALTOR® Party resources have helped to make their ongoing Quality of Life program meaningful and visible. “We’d still be involved in these charities and community outreach efforts, but the resources from NAR help us take it to the next level. It really makes a huge difference,” she says.

To learn more about the Billings Association’s Quality of Life Program, contact Amber Sundsted, Government Affairs Director, Billings Association of REALTORS® at 406-248-7145 or amber@billings.org



Pictured above: Susan B. Lovely, Dan Patterson and Jeanne Peterson at last year's run.



Pictured above: Billings Association members at last year's run.



Pictured at left: Joan Wilson, REALTOR® and Dress for Success Board member; Trina White, President of BAR; Angela Hughes, Quality of Life Co-Chair, at last year's check presentation.